

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:48 a.m. at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Hope Masters, special adviser, Leon H. Sullivan Foundation, and her husband Carlton A. Masters; Howard F. Jeter, president and chief executive officer, Leon H. Sullivan Foundation; Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi E. Frazer; President Thomas Yayi Boni of Benin and his wife Chantal de Souza Yayi; President

Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete of Tanzania and his wife Mama Salma Kikwete; Anug Shah, owner, A to Z Textiles; President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and his wife Jeannette Nyiramongi; President John Agyekum Kufuor of Ghana and his wife Theresa Kufuor; entertainer Jordin Sparks; and U.S. Ambassador to Ghana Pamela E. Bridgewater.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Former Cabinet Secretaries and Senior Government Officials

February 26, 2008

I've just had a fascinating meeting with folks who have served our country nobly in the past. I thank them for coming. We got Democrats here; Republicans are here; concerned citizens. And our discussion was the trade bill with Colombia.

The trade bill is—with Colombia is a really important piece of legislation for America's national security. A stable neighborhood is in our interests. We want people to be prosperous; we want people to be free; we want people to feel comfortable about making, you know, the tough decisions that democracy requires. And the trade vote with Colombia would say a clear message to a strong democratic ally: We support you; we support you in your efforts.

A defeat of the trade bill with Colombia would send a contradictory message. It would embolden the false populism that exists on the continent. It would send a chilling signal to our allies, and it would harm national security of the United States.

We also talked about the economic benefits. Many of the Colombian goods come

into our country duty free. It seems like we ought to be treated the same way by sending our products into their countries. And this will particularly benefit small businesses and farmers and ranchers.

And I want to thank you for your suggestions on how to advance this trade bill, how we can work with both Republicans and Democrats to get this trade bill out soon. It's in the Nation's interests. And a lot of times people think about trade, it's just an economic issue. In this case, it is a national security issue and one that the members of both parties must take seriously. And I repeat: If the trade bill with Colombia is defeated, it will harm the national security interests of the country.

And I thank you all for coming. I appreciate your time. Thank you for your advice.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:11 p.m. in Room 350 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks on the Picturing America Initiative *February 26, 2008*

Thank you all for coming. Please be seated. Thank you. Welcome to the White House. Looks like we have a distinguished crowd here today. Most of you are renowned scholars, intellectuals, and writers. You've earned reputations for expressing man's noblest deeds and thoughts in pristine, eloquent English, just like me. [Laughter]

Justice, thanks for coming. Appreciate you being here. I thank members of the Cabinet who have joined us. Ambassador, glad you're here.

I want to say a word about Bruce Cole. Bruce is an accomplished art historian, a good man, and he's been a great Chairman of the National Endowment of the Humanities.

Bruce understands what all of you understand: At their best, the arts and humanities express the ideals that define our Nation. The United States is a country defined not by bloodline, race, or creed, but by our character and convictions. We are united by an unyielding principle, and that is, all men are created equal. We firmly believe that each man and woman has the right to make the most of their God-given talents. And we believe that all are endowed with the divine gift of freedom.

These ideals have sustained us throughout the centuries, and as a new generation is called to defend the principles of our democracy, they must understand why these principles are worthy of effort and sacrifice.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is at the forefront of this vital educational mission. One way the endowment fulfills this mission is through the "We the People" program, which we established in 2002 to address gaps in our children's knowledge of history and civics.

In just 5 years, the program has awarded nearly 1,400 grants to projects that preserve

historical sites, documents, and artifacts and train future historians. In partnership with the American Library Association, "We the People" has produced an annual bookshelf on enduring American themes such as courage and freedom. More than 6,000 sets of these books have been provided to schools and public libraries across the country.

"We the People" teacher workshops have allowed thousands of educators to discover American history in places where history was made: Ellis Island or the waters of Pearl Harbor. The initiative's National Digital Newspaper Program is making millions of pages of historic American newspapers accessible online. Countless students and teachers and historians will benefit from these important first drafts of history.

In all these ways, "We the People" does an outstanding job of passing America's rich heritage on to future generations. Today I'm pleased to unveil a new project under this program, the Picturing America Initiative. This initiative will educate children about the great people and places and moments in our history using American art and masterpieces that depict them.

It's much better for us to hear about educational programs from someone who's probably more qualified than me—[laughter]—like a former teacher or a librarian. [Laughter] And so it's my honor to welcome Laura, the First Lady.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:47 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonin Scalia; and Italy's Ambassador to the U.S. Giovanni Castellaneta. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.